

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

By Lord Dunsany



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If Shakespeare Lived To-day

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IF

IF SHAKESPEARE LIVED TO-DAY

By
Lord Dunsany

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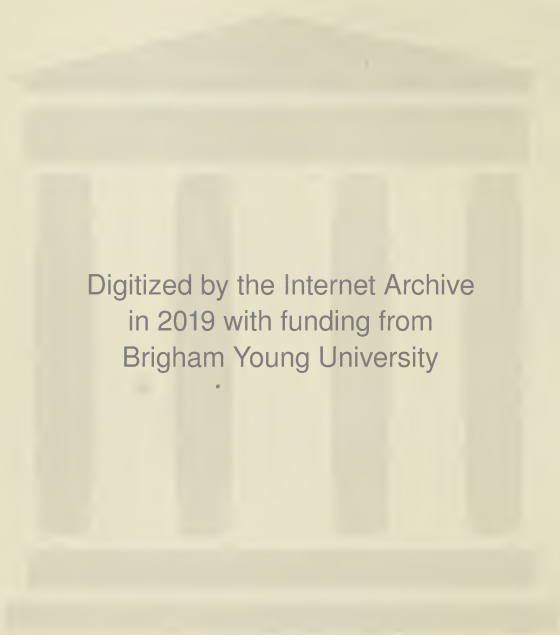
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SIR WEBLEY WOOTHERY-JURNIP	}	<i>Members of the Olympus.</i>
MR. NEEKS		

JERGINS, *an old waiter.*

MR. TRUNDLEBEN, *Secretary of the Club.*

MR. GLEEK, *Editor of the "Banner and Evening
Gazette," and member of the Olympus.*



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Scene : A room in the Olympus Club.

Time : After luncheon.

SIR WEBLEY WOOTHERY-JURNIP and MR. NEEKS sit by a small table. Further away sits MR. GLEEK, the Editor of the "*Banner and Evening Gazette*." SIR WEBLEY JURNIP rises and rings the bell by the fire-place. He returns to his seat.

MR. NEEKS : I see there's a man called Mr. William Shakespeare putting up for the Club.

SIR WEBLEY : Shakespeare ? Shakespeare ? Shakespeare ? I once knew a man called Shaker.

NEEKS : No, it's Shakespeare—Mr. William Shakespeare.

SIR WEBLEY : Shakespeare ? Shakespeare ? Do you know anything about him ?

NEEKS : Well, I don't exactly recall—I made sure that you——

SIR WEBLEY : The Secretary ought to be more careful. Waiter !

JERGINS : Yes, Sir Webley. *[He comes.*

SIR WEBLEY : Coffee, Jergins. Same as usual.

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JERGINs: Yes, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: And, Jergins—there's a man called Mr. William Shakespeare putting up for the Club.

JERGINs: I'm sorry to hear that, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: Yes, Jergins. Well, there it is, you see; and I want you to go up and ask Mr. Trundleben if he'd come down.

JERGINs: Certainly, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: And then get my coffee.

JERGINs: Yes, Sir Webley.

[He goes slowly away.]

NEEKs: He'll be able to tell us all about him.

SIR WEBLEY: At the same time he should be more careful.

NEEKs: I'm afraid—I'm afraid he's getting rather, rather old.

SIR WEBLEY: Oh, I don't know, he was seventy only the other day. I don't call that too old—nowadays. He can't be now, he can't be more than, let me see, seventy-eight. Where does this Mr. Shaker live?

NEEKs: Shakespeare. Somewhere down in Warwickshire. A village called Bradford, I think, is the address he gives in the Candidates' Book.

SIR WEBLEY: Warwickshire! I do seem to remember something about him now. If he's the same man I certainly do. William Shakespeare, you said.

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NEEKS : Yes, that's the name.

SIR WEBLEY : Well, I certainly have heard about him now you mention it.

NEEKS : Really ! And what does he do ?

SIR WEBLEY : Do ? Well, from what I heard he poaches.

NEEKS : Poaches !

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, a poacher. Trundleben deserves to get the sack for this. A poacher from the wilds of Warwickshire. I heard all about him. He got after the deer at Charlecote.

NEEKS : A poacher !

SIR WEBLEY : That's all he is, a poacher. A member of the Olympus ! He'll be dropping in here one fine day with other people's rabbits in his pockets.

[Enter JERGINs.

JERGINs : Your coffee, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : My coffee. I should think so. (*He sips it.*) One needs it.

JERGINs : Mr. Trundleben will be down at once, Sir Webley. I telephoned up to him.

SIR WEBLEY : Telephoned ! Telephoned ! The Club's getting more full of new-fangled devices every day. I remember the time when—— Thank you, Jergins.

[JERGINs *retires.*

This is a pretty state of things, Neeks.

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NEEKS : A pretty state of things indeed, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Ah, here's Trundleben.

NEEKS : He'll tell us all about it, Sir Webley. I'm sure he'll——

SIR WEBLEY : Ah, Trundleben. Come and sit down here. Come and——

TRUNDLEBEN : Thank you, Sir Webley. I think I will. I don't walk quite as well as I used, and what with——

SIR WEBLEY : What's all this we hear about this Mr. Shakespeare, Trundleben ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, ah, well yes, yes indeed. Well, you see, Sir Webley, he was put up for the Club. Mr. Henry put him up.

SIR WEBLEY (*disapprovingly*) : Oh, Mr. Henry.

NEEKS : Yes, yes, yes. Long hair and all that.

SIR WEBLEY : I'm afraid so.

NEEKS : Writes poetry, I believe.

SIR WEBLEY : I'm afraid so.

TRUNDLEBEN : Well then, what does Mr. Newton do but go and second him, and there you are, Sir Weblsey.

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, a pretty state of things. Has he . . . Does he . . . What is he ?

TRUNDLEBEN : He seems to write, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Oh, he does, does he ? What does he write ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, I wrote and asked him that Sir Webley, and *he* said plays.

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SIR WEBLEY : Plays ? Plays ? Plays ? I'm sure I never heard . . . What plays ?

TRUNDLEBEN : I asked him that, Sir Webley, and he said . . . he sent me a list (*fumbling*). Ah, here it is.

[He holds it high, far from his face, tilts his head back and looks down his nose through his glasses.]

He says—let me see—"Hamelt," or "Hamlet," I don't know how he pronounces it. "Hamelt, Hamlet"; he spells it "H-a-m-l-e-t." If you pronounce it the way one pronounces handle, it would be "Hamelt," but if—

SIR WEBLEY : What's it all about ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, I gathered the scene was in Denmark.

NEEKS : Denmark ! H'm ! another of those neutrals !

SIR WEBLEY : Well, I wouldn't so much mind where the scene of the play was put, if only it was a play one ever had heard of.

NEEKS : But those men who have much to do with neutrals are rather the men—don't you think, Sir Webley ?—who . . .

SIR WEBLEY : Who want watching. I believe you're right, Neeks. And that type of unsuccessful play-wright is just the kind of man I always rather . . .

NEEKS : That's rather what I feel, Sir Webley.

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SIR WEBLEY : It wouldn't be a bad plan if we told somebody about him.

NEEKS : I think I know just the man, Sir Webley. I'll just drop him a line.

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, and if he's all right there's no harm done, but I always suspect that kind of fellow. Well, what else, Trundleben ? This is getting interesting.

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, Sir Webley, it's really very funny, but he sent me a list of the characters in this play of his, "Hamelt," and, and it's really rather delicious——

NEEKS : Yes ?

SIR WEBLEY : Yes ? What is it ?

TRUNDLEBEN : He's got a *ghost* in his play. (*He-he-he-he-he*) A ghost ! He really has.

SIR WEBLEY : What ! Not on the stage ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Yes, on the stage !

NEEKS : Well, well, well.

SIR WEBLEY : But that's absurd.

TRUNDLEBEN : I met Mr. Vass the other day—it was his four hundredth presentation of "The Nighty"—and I told him about it. He said that bringing a ghost on the stage was, of course—er—ludicrous.

SIR WEBLEY : What else does he say he's done ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Er—er—there's an absurdly long list—er—"Macbeth."

SIR WEBLEY : "Macbeth." That's Irish.

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NEEKS : Ah, yes. Abbey Theatre style of thing.

TRUNDLEBEN : I think I heard he offered it them.
But of course——

SIR WEBLEY : No, quite so.

TRUNDLEBEN : I gathered it was all rather a—rather
a sordid story.

SIR WEBLEY (*solemnly*) : Ah !

[NEEK *with equal solemnity wags his head.*

TRUNDLEBEN (*focussing his list again*) : Here's a very
funny one. This is funnier than
“Hamlet.” “The Tempest.” And the
stage directions are “The sea, with a
ship.”

SIR WEBLEY (*laughs*) : Oh, that's lovely ! That's
really too good. The sea with a ship !
And what's it all about ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, I rather gathered that it was
about a magician, and he—he makes a
storm.

SIR WEBLEY : He makes a storm. Splendid ! On
the stage, I suppose.

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh yes, on the stage.

[SIR WEBLEY and NEEK *laugh heartily.*

NEEKS : He'd . . . He'd have to be a magician for
that, wouldn't he ?

SIR WEBLEY : Ha, ha ! Very good ! He'd have to
be a magician to do that, Trundleben.

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TRUNDLEBEN : Yes, indeed, Sir Webley ; indeed he would, Mr. Neeks.

SIR WEBLEY : But that stage direction is priceless. I'd really like to copy that down if you'd let me. What is it ? "The sea with a ship" ? It's the funniest bit of the lot.

TRUNDLEBEN : Yes, that's it, Sir Webley. Wait a moment, I have it here. The—the whole thing is "the sea with a ship, afterwards an island." Very funny indeed.

SIR WEBLEY : "Afterwards an island" ! That's very good, too. "Afterwards an island." I'll put that down also. (*He writes.*) And what else, Trundleben ? What else ?

[TRUNDLEBEN *holds out his list again.*

TRUNDLEBEN : "The Tragedy of—of King Richard the—the Second."

SIR WEBLEY : But *was* his life a tragedy ? *Was* it a tragedy, Neeks ?

NEEKS : I—I—well I'm not quite sure ; I really don't think so. But I'll look it up.

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, we can look it up.

TRUNDLEBEN : I think it was rather—perhaps *rather* tragic, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Oh, I don't say it wasn't. No doubt. No doubt at all. That's one thing.

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But to call his whole life a tragedy is—
quite another. What, Neeks?

NEEKS: Oh, quite another.

TRUNDLEBEN: Oh, certainly, Sir Webley. Tragedy
is—er—is a very strong term indeed, to
—to apply to such a case.

SIR WEBLEY: He was probably out poaching when
he should have been learning his history.

TRUNDLEBEN: I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY: And what else, eh? Anything more?

TRUNDLEBEN: Well, there are some poems, he says.
[Holds up a list.]

SIR WEBLEY: And what are they about?

TRUNDLEBEN: Well, there's one called . . . Oh.
I'd really rather not mention that one;
perhaps that had better be left out
altogether.

NEEKS: Not . . . ?

SIR WEBLEY: Not quite . . . ?

TRUNDLEBEN: No, not at all.

SIR WEBLEY and NEEKS: H'm.

TRUNDLEBEN: Left out altogether. And then
there are "Sonnets," and—and "Venus
and Adonis," and—and "The Phoenix
and the Turtle."

SIR WEBLEY: The Phoenix and the what?

TRUNDLEBEN: The Turtle.

SIR WEBLEY: Oh. Go on . . .

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TRUNDLEBEN : One called "The Passionate Pilgrim,"
another "A Lover's Complaint."

SIR WEBLEY : I think the whole thing's very regrettable.

NEEKS : I think so too, Sir Webley.

TRUNDLEBEN (*mournfully*) : And there've been no poets since poor Browning died, none at all. It's absurd for him to call himself a poet.

NEEKS : Quite so, Trundleben, quite so.

SIR WEBLEY : And all these plays. What does he mean by calling them plays ? They've never been acted.

TRUNDLEBEN : Well—er—no, not exactly acted, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : What do you mean by not exactly, Trundleben ?

TRUNDLEBEN : Well, I believe they were acted in America, though of course not in London.

SIR WEBLEY : In America ? What's that got to do with it. America ? Why, that's the other side of the Atlantic.

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, yes, Sir WEBLEY, I—I quite agree with you.

SIR WEBLEY : America ! I daresay they did. I daresay they did act them. But that doesn't make him a suitable member for the Olympus. Quite the contrary.

NEEKS : Oh, quite the contrary.

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TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, certainly, Sir Webley, certainly.

SIR WEBLEY : I daresay "Macbeth" would be the sort of thing that would appeal to Irish Americans. *Just* the sort of thing.

TRUNDLEBEN : Very likely, Sir Webley, I'm sure.

SIR WEBLEY : Their game laws are very lax, I believe, over there ; they probably took to him on account of his being a poacher.

TRUNDLEBEN : I've no doubt of it, Sir Webley. Very likely,

NEEKS : I expect that was just it.

SIR WEBLEY : Well now, Trundleben ; are we to ask the Olympus to elect a man who'll come in here with his pockets bulging with rabbits.

NEEKS : Rabbits, and hares too.

SIR WEBLEY : And venison even, if you come to that.

TRUNDLEBEN : Yes indeed, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Thank God the Olympus can get its haunch of venison without having to go to a man like that for it.

NEEKS : Yes indeed.

TRUNDLEBEN : Indeed I hope so.

SIR WEBLEY : Well now, about those plays. I don't say we've absolute proof that the man's entirely hopeless. We must be sure of our ground.

NEEKS : Yes, quite so.

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TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, I'm afraid Sir Webley, they're very bad indeed. There are some quite unfortunate—er—references in them.

SIR WEBLEY : So I should have supposed. So I should have supposed.

NEEKS : Yes, yes, of course.

TRUNDLEBEN : For instance, in that play about that funny ship—I have a list of the characters here—and I'm afraid, well—er,—er you see for yourself. (*Hands paper.*) You see that is, I am afraid, in very bad taste, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Certainly, Trundleben, certainly. Very bad indeed.

NEEKS (*peering*) : Er—er, what is it, Sir Webley ?

SIR WEBLEY (*pointing*) : That, you see.

NEEKS : A—a drunken butler ! But most regrettable.

SIR WEBLEY : A very deserving class. A—a quite gratuitous slight. I don't say you mightn't see one drunken butler . . .

TRUNDLEBEN : Quite so.

NEEKS : Yes, of course.

SIR WEBLEY : But to put it boldly on a programme like that is practically tantamount to implying that all butlers are drunken.

TRUNDLEBEN : Which is by no means true.

SIR WEBLEY : There would naturally be a protest of some sort, and to have a member of

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the Olympus mixed up with a controversy like that would be—er—naturally—er—most . . .

TRUNDLEBEN : Yes, of course, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : And then of course, if he does a thing like that once . . .

NEEKS : There are probably other lapses just as deplorable.

TRUNDLEBEN : I haven't gone through his whole list, Sir Webley. I often feel about these modern writers that perhaps the less one looks the less one will find that might be, er . . .

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, quite so.

NEEKS : That is certainly true.

SIR WEBLEY : Well, we can't wade all through his list of characters to see if they are all suitable to be represented on a stage.

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh no, Sir Webley, quite impossible ; there are—there are—I might say—hundreds of them.

SIR WEBLEY : Good gracious ! He must have been wasting his time a great deal.

TRUNDLEBEN : Oh, a great deal, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : But we shall have to go further into this. We can't have . . .

NEEKS : I see Mr. Gleek sitting over there, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Why, yes, yes, so he is.

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NEEKS : The *Banner and Evening Gazette* would know all about him if there's anything to know.

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, of course they would.

NEEKS : If we were to ask him.

SIR WEBLEY : Well, Trundleben, you may leave it to us. Mr. Neeks and I will talk it all over and see what's to be done.

TRUNDLEBEN : Thank you, Sir Webley. I'm really very sorry it all happened—very sorry indeed.

SIR WEBLEY : Very well, Trundleben, we'll see what's to be done. If nothing's known of him and his plays, you'll have to write and request him to withdraw his candidature. But we'll see. We'll see.

TRUNDLEBEN : Thank you, Sir Webley. I'm sure I'm very sorry it all occurred. Thank you, Mr. Neeks.

[Exit TRUNDLEBEN, waddling slowly away.]

SIR WEBLEY : Well, Neeks, that's what it will have to be. If nothing whatever's known of him we can't have him putting up for the Olympus.

NEEKS : Quite so, Sir Webley. I'll call Mr. Gleek's attention.

[He begins to rise, hopefully looking Gleek-wards, when JERGINS comes between him and Mr. GLEEK. He has come to take away the coffee.]

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SIR WEBLEY : Times are changing, Jergins.

JERGINS : I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Changing fast, and new members putting up for the Club.

JERGINS : Yes, I'm afraid so, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : You notice it too, Jergins.

JERGINS : Yes, Sir Webley, it's come all of a sudden.
Only last week I saw . . .

SIR WEBLEY : Well, Jergins.

JERGINS : I saw Lord Pondleburrow wearing a . . .

SIR WEBLEY : Wearing what, Jergins ?

JERGINS : Wearing one of those billycock hats, Sir Webley.

SIR WEBLEY : Well, well. I suppose they've got to change, but not at that rate.

JERGINS : No, Sir Webley.

[EXIT, *shaking his head as he goes.*

SIR WEBLEY : Well, we must find out about this fellow.

NEEKS : Yes. I'll call Mr. Gleek's attention. He knows all about that sort of thing.

SIR WEBLEY : Yes, yes. Just . . .

[NEEKS *rises and goes some of the way towards GLEEK's chair.*

NEEKS : Er—er——

GLEEK (*looking round*) : Yes ?

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SIR WEBLEY : Do you know anything of a man called
Mr. William Shakespeare ?

GLEEK (*looking over his pince-nez*) : No !

*[He shakes his head several times and
returns to his paper.]*

CURTAIN.



